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14. ABSTRACT The doctrinal basis for defeating an enemy is the proper identification of an enemy's center of gravity (COG) and attacking it. This concept is applicable to the War on Terror. Al-Qaeda is an ideology and an organization providing operational level inspiration and guidance to insurgencies throughout the Muslim world. Al-Qaeda's basis of support among Muslims is its ideology - a rejection of the West and return to fundamentalist Islam. This ideology is al-Qaeda's strategic COG. Al-Qaeda's struggle is best understood as a global insurgency with many local insurgency subsets rather than a global war of terror. Each local insurgency is connected to al-Qaeda's global insurgent war against the West through ideology. At the operational level, an insurgency's COG is the population's support, and this is al-Qaeda's operational COG. Al-Qaeda's ideology attracts the population and local insurgents to al-Qaeda, which in turn connects theater of operations insurgencies to al-Qaeda's global war. By attacking the al-Qaeda ideology at the operational level, an operational commander can weaken an insurgency by making it a local affair not connected to the larger global struggle. The al-Qaeda ideology is a decisive point at the operational level of counterinsurgency.					
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ATTACKING AL-QAEDA'S OPERATIONAL CENTERS OF GRAVITY

by

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**A paper submitted to the Faculty of the Naval War College in partial satisfaction of
the requirements of the Department of Joint Military Operations.**

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endorsed by the Naval War College or the Department of the Navy.**

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Abstract

In U.S. Joint doctrine the basis for defeating an enemy is the proper identification of an enemy's center of gravity (COG) and subsequently attacking it. This concept is applicable to the current War on Terror (WOT). This paper will argue that al-Qaeda is both an ideology and an organization providing operational level inspiration and guidance to insurgencies throughout the Muslim world. Al-Qaeda's basis of support among Muslims is its ideology - a rejection of the West and return to fundamentalist Islam. This ideology is al-Qaeda's strategic COG.

Al-Qaeda's struggle is best understood as a global insurgency with many local insurgency subsets rather than a global war of terror. Each local insurgency has distinct regional, cultural, and grievance aspects, but each is connected to al-Qaeda's larger global insurgent war against the West through ideology. At the operational level, an insurgency's COG is the population's support, which provides recruits, logistics, and intelligence. The population's support is al-Qaeda's operational COG. Al-Qaeda's ideology attracts the population and local insurgents to al-Qaeda, which in turn connects theater of operations insurgencies to al-Qaeda's world wide insurgent war.

By attacking the al-Qaeda ideology at the operational level, an operational commander can weaken an insurgency by making it a local affair not connected to the larger global struggle. This will also deny al-Qaeda the synergy of many operational level insurgencies fighting in its name. The al-Qaeda ideology is a decisive point at the operational level of counterinsurgency and it can be attacked both directly and indirectly.

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Introduction

Since 11 September 2001, al-Qaeda has been significantly degraded.¹ Three-quarters of its leadership have been killed or captured.² Osama bin Laden's ability to initiate and direct attacks is limited, and al-Qaeda can no longer function as a central headquarters.³ However, al-Qaeda is still important. In a speech in September 2006, President Bush referred to al-Qaeda or bin Laden 35 times,⁴ and although bin Laden and his deputy, Ayman al-Zawahiri, no longer control daily operations, they provide strategic guidance to al-Qaeda and its associated movements. Their statements have usually preceded attacks,⁵ and they have supporters in at least 40 nations.⁶ The insurgents in Iraq directly connected to al-Qaeda comprise the smallest insurgent group there, yet they conduct the most ferocious attacks.⁷

Today, Islamic extremist organizations are becoming more widespread and diffuse. They often lack a direct link to al-Qaeda's strategic leadership but are inspired by al-Qaeda's vision and ideology, and al-Qaeda sometimes assists in their training. Al-Qaeda's operational role is subdued, but its ideological, propaganda, and support roles are critical to its affiliates. Al-Qaeda has become an ideological movement,⁸ providing the inspiration and strategic direction to many transnational groups. Many groups now adhere to the original goals and ideology of al-Qaeda, which extends the scope of its influence well beyond that of the original organization, although al-Qaeda itself is still considered the most dangerous of all transnational extremist groups and is the U.S.'s principal enemy.⁹

In U.S. Joint doctrine the basis for defeating an enemy is the proper identification of an enemy's center of gravity (COG) and subsequently attacking it. This concept is

applicable to the current War on Terror (WOT). Al-Qaeda is both an ideology and an organization providing operational level inspiration and guidance to insurgencies throughout the Muslim world. It has a strategic COG - ideology, and operational COGs - the popular support of local populations. Operational commanders can attack al-Qaeda's operational COGs both directly and indirectly through the decisive point of ideology in a theater of operations.

Al-Qaeda's Goals, Ideology, and Basis of Support

Al-Qaeda's goals and ideology are stated in the writings, statements, and interviews of bin Laden and Zawahiri, to include a *fatwa*, or religious ruling, which bin Laden released in 1998 declaring war on the U.S. and Israel. Other writings have also appeared by others Islamic extremists with ties to bin Laden. These represent a *Salafi* version of Sunni Islam: fundamentalist, puritanical, and advocating the end of secular governments in the Muslim world.¹⁰

The principal goals of al-Qaeda are:

1. All U.S. and Western forces must be removed from the Arabian Peninsula, which contains Islam's holiest sites. At the end of the 1991 Gulf War, U.S. forces remained in Saudi Arabia to prevent Iraq from further threatening its neighbors and to enforce economic sanctions. Bin Laden stated that the economic sanctions and other U.S. actions against Iraq resulted in the deaths of over one million Iraqis, and that the U.S. remained in Saudi Arabia after the Gulf War to humiliate Muslims and exploit their resources. (In fact, the Saudi government had requested that U.S. forces defend it after Iraq's invasion of Kuwait and had allowed those forces to remain after the war. Bin Laden declared this the greatest disaster ever to happen in the Arabian Peninsula and

declared the Saudi regime apostate.¹¹ Ironically, it was the 2003 U.S. occupation of Iraq which allowed most of the U.S. forces to depart.)

2. In addition to the Arabian Peninsula, all U.S. forces in Iraq, Afghanistan, and other Muslim lands must be expelled. (In bin Laden's worldview and that of many Muslims, the occupation of Muslim lands by non-Muslim forces is a new crusade against Islam. Others would add that the Qur'an specifically states that the occupation of Muslim lands by non-Muslims should always be opposed.¹²)

3. Worldwide, the U.S. must stop its support to nations such as Russia, India, and China which oppress Muslims. Non-Muslims, with U.S. support, have killed Muslims in Chechnya, Bosnia, and Kashmir, and oppressed Muslims in places like the Xinjiang Province of China. In the Yugoslavian Civil War, the U.S. watched as Muslim civilians were killed and did nothing as Russians killed Chechen Muslims.¹³

4. The U.S. must stop its support of repressive Muslim states such as Saudi Arabia, Egypt, and Jordan, and stop its support of Israel. The U.S. supports oppressive and corrupt Arab governments which do nothing for their people. Israel is occupying Muslim Palestine, persecuting Palestinians, and eager to expand. The U.S. provided the arms which Israel used to kill innocent Muslims; the U.S. is as responsible for their deaths as is Israel. Ultimately, Israel should be destroyed.¹⁴

5. Finally, an Islamic Caliphate under the rule of Islamic law must be established in an area corresponding to the historic Islamic empire.¹⁵

Bin Laden wants to change U.S. policies towards the Islamic world, not to destroy the U.S. He views U.S. actions as weakening the Muslim world to ensure American hegemony and to guarantee Israel's expansion. To bin Laden, the U.S., through its

actions, has declared war against Islam, and it is every Muslim's duty to defend the Islamic community. According to religious clerics throughout history, *jihad*, religious war, is the duty of all Muslims when the community is under attack. It is the duty of all Muslims to kill Americans, both military and civilians, and their allies.¹⁶

These goals, along with *Salafi* Islam, comprise the ideology of al-Qaeda, an ideology of *jihad*. Besides imposing Islamic law in an Islamic Caliphate, purged of Western influences, little is discussed. Specifics such as the economy or health care are not addressed, other than that the Muslim world's energy resources will be better utilized.¹⁷ According to the 2006 *National Military Strategic Plan for the War on Terrorism* (NMSPWOT), ideology is the critical component of extremist movements. It can enable extremists to produce followers faster than they can be killed.¹⁸ However, only a few of the world's 1.3 billion Muslims adhere to al-Qaeda's tenets. Most Muslims do not want to live in an Islamic Caliphate, and surveys show support among Muslims for Western principles such as elected governments and universal education, although many Muslims sympathize with the issues al-Qaeda discusses.¹⁹

Few Muslims are attracted to al-Qaeda; rather some believe that it offers an alternative to unjust U.S. policy.²⁰ Many Muslims see the Palestinian-Israeli conflict as a struggle for Palestinian self-determination. The U.S.'s labeling of the Palestinian struggle as terrorism did not help a perception that Israel used WOT to justify its actions against the Palestinians. The U.S. invasion of Iraq, coupled with no progress in settling the Israel-Palestinian conflict, has lent support to the notion that Iraq was invaded to support Israel.²¹ When bin Laden indicated that the 9-11 attacks were retaliation for U.S. and Israeli actions in Palestine and Lebanon, some Muslims felt he was correct.²²

Likewise, Arabs and Muslims firmly believe in self-determination. They agree that many of their governments need reform but that it should come from within. Some view the U.S. invasion of Iraq as a new imperialism and a settling of old accounts.²³

Opinion polls, which should be viewed with suspicion in the Middle East, indicate, if even only partly correct, a disturbing trend. A Pew Global Attitude Project in March 2004 found that bin Laden was viewed favorably by 65% in Pakistan, 55% in Jordan, and 45% in Morocco.²⁴ In contrast, other polls taken in 2005 found that the U.S. was viewed favorably by only 23% in Pakistan and Turkey and by 25% in Jordan.²⁵ Bizarre conspiracy theories have always been present in the Arab world. Many believe that the CIA and Israeli Mossad conspired to conduct the 9-11 attacks to hurt Islam, and that the doctrine of preventative attack was developed by the U.S. and Israel together.²⁶

Due to globalized communications, a transnational Muslim identity of perceived common suffering has developed. The suffering of Muslims in Chechnya, Palestine, Kashmir, or Iraq is felt by Muslims everywhere.²⁷ Globalization enables the spread of extremism through the reporting of alleged injustices in real time through the TV, radio, and Internet. It facilitates extremist recruitment and creates sympathy for their cause.²⁸ Bin Laden dominates communications to such an extent that the U.S. is no longer associated with liberty and democracy.²⁹

Millions of Muslims believe their faith is under attack.³⁰ Following 9-11, phrases like “regime change,” “regional reform,” and “the axis of evil,” had negative connotations. Evil, viewed as a religious term, was directed against two prominent Muslim nations, Iraq and Iran. There was the continuous identification of the 9-11 terrorists as Muslims. Other comments made it sound as if the U.S. would impose

democracy and freedom on the world. U.S. unilateral action, or assisted only by Western nations that were former colonial powers, added to the perceptions.³¹

In the Qur'an, there are two reasons for *jihad* as it applies to war. The first is defensive *jihad* when Muslim lands are under attack, and the second is offensive *jihad*. Muslims generally believe that defensive *jihad* is the most legitimate. Muslim clerics called for defensive *jihad* when the Soviet Union invaded Afghanistan in 1979. Al-Azhar University in Cairo is the main center of moderate Muslim thought. Before the U.S. invasion of Iraq, al-Azhar released a *fatwa* stating that if Iraq was invaded, it was the duty of every Muslim to oppose it. After the 9-11 attacks, al-Azhar had issued a *fatwa* condemning those attacks.³² Many *fatwas* have been issued concerning the invasion of Iraq, by liberal, conservative, and radical clerics – all call for *jihad* against the U.S.³³

The War on Terror as Counterinsurgency

According to David Kilcullen, bin Laden's *jihad* is best viewed as a global insurgency. Traditionally, insurgencies try to change governments in a single nation; however, the global insurgency spans many countries and seeks change in the Islamic world.³⁴ Its goal is to weaken Western influences, change the balance of power, and establish a caliphate.³⁵ In the global insurgency, al-Qaeda integrates local grievances through its ideology to create the synergy of a global insurgency.³⁶ Almost every country in the U.S. CENTCOM area of responsibility is in the historic Islamic Caliphate, and almost all of its 27 countries contain insurgencies,³⁷ which al-Qaeda tries to link to the global insurgency through the ideology of *jihad*.³⁸ The ideology is applicable at local levels because it is based in the transnational Muslim consciousness. Local issues become part of a global perception of persecution requiring an obligation to fight.³⁹

The global insurgency contains many regional and country insurgencies, and each has its own unique environment and circumstances. Each has a local agenda which might include purifying Islam locally or overthrowing a government, and some have no connection to the global *jihad*.⁴⁰ Al-Qaeda's strategic leadership connects these insurgencies to its global insurgency through its operational level leaders who link to local, tactical leaders.⁴¹ Within a particular insurgency, there will be purely local insurgents and perhaps al-Qaeda, global, *jihadi* insurgents. The insurgency will be driven by local issues and perhaps by the ideology of *jihad*.⁴²

Kilcullen identifies nine operational theaters in the global *jihad*, six of which include active insurgencies. Examples are the Greater Middle East, East Africa, Southeast Asia, and South and Central Asia. In these theaters, through operational leaders, the insurgents in one country cooperate and coordinate with those in another country. The operational leaders follow al-Qaeda's ideology and strategic direction, but al-Qaeda does not directly control their actions. There are also links between the theaters and al-Qaeda, which include financing, targeting data, and tactics sharing.⁴³

Examples of these linked insurgencies are numerous. Abu Sayf insurgents in the Philippines have allied themselves with al-Qaeda.⁴⁴ The Taliban in Afghanistan have a close relationship with al-Qaeda. In Iraq there are two major groups of insurgents. The first are the Iraqi Sunni insurgents who are nationalists and desire to restore a Ba'athist-type government. They are not concerned with global *jihad*. The second group are al-Qaeda *jihadi* insurgents. They are fighting to establish a caliphate and see their struggle linked to global *jihad*. Some Iraqi nationalist insurgents have joined the al-Qaeda insurgents, and others oppose them.⁴⁵

Since al-Qaeda is mounting a global insurgency, Kilcullen recommends considering WOT as counterinsurgency (COIN) rather than a fight against terrorism.⁴⁶ Terror is one component of an insurgency, which also includes subversion, sabotage, guerrilla warfare, and propaganda operations.⁴⁷ A COIN approach would address the causes of the insurgency, since insurgents are symptoms of larger issues in a society, and includes militarily, political, economic, psychological, and civic actions.⁴⁸ As noted, traditionally insurgency was thought of in terms of a single nation, but now, U.S. Army COIN doctrine recognizes global insurgency.⁴⁹

Centers of Gravity in the War on Terror

WOT, properly understood as global COIN, is a campaign that spans the world.⁵⁰ In prosecuting a campaign, the concept of center of gravity (COG) plays a central role. A COG provides moral or physical strength to the enemy,⁵¹ and a sound campaign plan is based on its proper identification.⁵² One COG exists at each level of war – strategic, operational, and tactical. At the strategic level, the COG might be a military force, a leader, or national will. At the operational level, it is normally a military force, but it could also be associated with a political, economic, or social system. According to JP 3-0, *Doctrine for Joint Operations*, “The essence of operational art lies in being able to produce the right combination of effects in time, space, and purpose relative to a COG to neutralize, weaken, destroy, or otherwise exploit it...”⁵³

Other key concepts are a systems perspective and decisive points (DP). A systems perspective provides an understanding of interrelated systems, such as political, social, military, economic, or informational systems. Each system contains nodes and links. Nodes are generally physical - people, materiel or facilities - and can be attacked.

Links are behavioral or functional; they could be a command relationship or an ideology. A DP is a location, event, factor or function that when attacked gives a marked advantage over an opponent. A DP might be a node or a link. DPs are not COGs, but they are key to attacking them. The operational environment must be analyzed to determine systems and their nodes and links that can be targeted to affect the COG. These become DPs.⁵⁴ Properly identifying COGs, systems, nodes, links, and DPs is no easy task. Cultural challenges complicate the process when they involve an opponent whose beliefs are different from one's own. This might include basic beliefs about good and evil and the value of life. What is fanatical to some might be normal to one's adversaries.⁵⁵

The NMSPWOT properly identifies al-Qaeda's strategic COG as its ideology.⁵⁶ Ideology provides global support and recruits, and links local Islamic insurgencies to the global insurgency. It is through the synergy gained by linking and combining insurgencies at the theater of operations and country levels to the strategic level that enables al-Qaeda to wage global insurgency. According to U.S. Army COIN doctrine, the insurgent COG in almost every insurgency is the support of the people/popular support. Popular support results in insurgent safe havens, freedom of movement, logistics support, financial support, intelligence, and recruits.⁵⁷ When applying the COIN concept to WOT, one should view Al-Qaeda's operational COGs as popular support in the theaters of operation and in specific countries. The link which connects the operational COG to the strategic COG - ideology - is the relationship between al-Qaeda *jihadi* insurgents at the local level with the people and local insurgents. In this case, ideology is a COG at the strategic level, but it is a link at the operational level. It unites the support of the people and local insurgents with al-Qaeda *jihadi* insurgents operating

at the local level, to al-Qaeda's operational leaders who link to the al-Qaeda strategic leadership. By viewing ideology as a DP at the operational level and attacking it, one can de-link local, operational insurgencies with the global insurgency. This would fulfill Kilcullen's "strategy of disaggregation."⁵⁸ Targeting ideology will also attack al-Qaeda's strategic COG since it is also ideology. The local insurgency will still exist, but it will no longer contribute to the synergy of global insurgency.

The DP of ideology can be attacked directly or indirectly. Direct attacks are those which offer a counter ideology or which discredit al-Qaeda's ideology. Indirect attacks are those that increase the legitimacy of a Host Nation (HN) facing an insurgency or that increase the legitimacy of partner nations or U.S. forces supporting the HN. If the nation is perceived as legitimate, it is meeting its people's needs; there is no reason to change the government and no need to seek an ideological link with al-Qaeda. A second means of indirect attack on ideology is to create or exploit differences between the local insurgents/population and al-Qaeda. This will make the local insurgents/population view al-Qaeda's ideology as inconsistent with their local goals.

U.S. Identification of Al-Qaeda's Centers of Gravity

Unfortunately, disaggregation is very complicated and requires the proper identification of COGs at all levels. Initially, the U.S. misidentified the strategic COG in WOT as al-Qaeda's leadership, and its strategy focused on eliminating its leaders.⁵⁹ The *National Security Strategy* (NSS) of 2002 stated that "Our priority will be first to disrupt and destroy terrorist organizations of global reach and attack their leadership...."⁶⁰ WOT was viewed as counterterrorism, so it focused on eliminating terrorist leaders.⁶¹ In

reality, even if bin Laden were captured or killed it would have little impact on al-Qaeda since there are others ready to take his place.⁶²

Today, the strategy to fight WOT is outlined in *The National Defense Strategy* (NDS) of 2005, and the NSS and NMSPWOT, both from 2006. Countering extremist ideology is a priority, and the NMSPWOT states that attacking the ideology attacks the strategic COG.⁶³ A counter ideology will delegitimize terrorism and make it politically impossible for any country to support it. It will change misperceptions of the U.S. and articulate that WOT is not a war on Islam but a civil war between Islamic moderates and extremists. Creating debate between extremists and moderates is probably more important than anything the U.S. says.⁶⁴ The use of force is a method to counter ideology, but respect for religion and culture must always be shown, and support must be given to moderate Muslim regimes that reject extremism. The NMSPWOT states that a DP is obtained when Muslim leaders begin to counter al-Qaeda's ideology.⁶⁵ Ultimately, victory will only come when the ideology is defeated.⁶⁶ Other themes in the three documents include the development of democracy, which is seen as the long term solution to transnational terrorism,⁶⁷ and working through partners and allies, especially in the Muslim world.⁶⁸

In today's environment of globalization and real time communications, actions at the national-strategic level can quickly have impacts and unintended consequences at the operational and tactical levels. Likewise, purely tactical or operational acts can quickly impact the national-strategic level. On 12 September 2006 in Germany, Pope Benedict XVI, while giving a lecture to university professors, quoted a Byzantine emperor who had characterized Islam as "evil and inhuman." This comment sparked protests and

violence in the Muslim world.⁶⁹ This act, although unintended, strengthened al-Qaeda's strategic COG and contributed to insurgents receiving greater support because Islam was perceived as under attack. In another instance, a popular Arabic language newspaper published in Egypt, *El-Sha'b*, headlined a story on 28 September 2006 stating that American soldiers had massacred an Iraqi family of eight, including two pregnant women, while the family was having an early morning Ramadan breakfast before beginning the day's fasting.⁷⁰ The story is either false or misreported. However, since this is an incident from the tactical/local level reported in another Muslim country, it had operational impacts since the U.S. is perceived as attacking innocent Muslims.

It is imperative that WOT not be perceived as a clash of civilizations, which is what al-Qaeda wants,⁷¹ because such a perception will strengthen its strategic and operational COGs. The NSS of 2006 emphasizes that WOT is a war of ideas but not of religions.⁷² However, comments stating that terrorists attacked the U.S. because they hated its freedom or way of life have contributed to the perception of a clash of civilizations. Bin Laden has said he is not attacking the U.S. because of its freedom; rather he is attacking the U.S. because of its actions in the Muslim world.⁷³ Following the 9-11 attacks, many Muslims supported the U.S. occupation of Afghanistan,⁷⁴ but others have argued that many U.S. actions since 9-11 have increased al-Qaeda's appeal.⁷⁵ U.S. unilateral acts or acts without Muslim coalition partners strengthen al-Qaeda's strategic and operational COGs.⁷⁶ At the other extreme, some U.S. acts, such as humanitarian assistance (HA) provided to tsunami victims, swung some Islamic Asian countries' public opinion in favor of the U.S.⁷⁷ Connecting Islam with fascism increases the perception of a clash of civilizations.⁷⁸

Recommendations for the Operational Commander

An operational commander can only attempt to break the link of ideology between the local insurgents/population and global *jihadi* insurgents in his theater of operations. It is the responsibility of others to engage the global insurgency at the national-strategic level.⁷⁹ An operational commander must recognize that his actions can have strategic effects and that actions by national-strategic actors can have effects at the operational level. The operational commander must not conduct actions that might inadvertently strengthen the enemy's strategic and operational COGs, and he must visualize potential unforeseen consequences.

As mentioned, an operational commander can attack the DP of ideology directly or indirectly. Direct attacks offer a counter ideology or discredit al-Qaeda's ideology. Indirect attacks are those that increase the legitimacy of the host nation (HN) facing the insurgency or the legitimacy of partner nations or U.S. forces supporting the HN. A second means of indirect attack on ideology is to create or exploit differences between the local insurgents/population and al-Qaeda.

Legitimacy is best achieved by employing the forces of Muslim partner nations or the indigenous forces of the HN confronting the insurgency. These forces must be seen by all as having the ability to deal with the problem without direct U.S. involvement, even if this is not the case. The use of Muslim partners or indigenous forces will also facilitate operations in a culture in which the U.S. has little expertise. They can infiltrate insurgent networks and be more readily accepted by the population.⁸⁰ While the NMSPWOT states that the use of force can counter ideology, overt, unilateral U.S. actions will weaken the HN's legitimacy, strengthen al-Qaeda's strategic COG,⁸¹ and

draw the population closer to *jihadi* insurgents in that the U.S. will be viewed as imperialistic. In addition, unilateral, non-Muslim actions against a Muslim nation or a Muslim community can make it a religious obligation for Muslims to resist.⁸²

There are numerous successful examples of the use of indigenous Muslim forces or partner nations which have strengthened legitimacy. The Jordanian army is training Iraqi counterterrorist (CT) forces in Jordan, staffing a military hospital in Fallujah, and sealing the Iraqi-Jordanian border,⁸³ which adds legitimacy to U.S. COIN operations in Iraq. Sudan, even though a state sponsor of terror,⁸⁴ has arrested al-Qaeda members and eliminated al-Qaeda training camps in its land.⁸⁵ Yemen, with mostly only indirect U.S. involvement, has been successful in fighting al-Qaeda extremists. Its CT unit, trained by the U.S., has killed or captured many al-Qaeda members, and al-Qaeda's pre-9-11 leadership in Yemen has been eliminated. It is no longer feared that Yemen will become an al-Qaeda base of operations. Yemen is also trying to prevent its citizens from going to Iraq to fight *jihad*. However, there has been a backlash by the population against the Yemeni government's cooperation with the U.S. due to Yemeni detainees in Guantanamo Bay, U.S. policy in Iraq, and U.S. support of Israel.⁸⁶ An operational commander must consider that even limited, open U.S. assistance or HN support to the U.S. can have a negative impact and unforeseen consequences.

Another successful example of creating legitimacy through work with partners is Combined Joint Task Force Horn of Africa (CJTF-HOA), stood up in 2002 in Djibouti.⁸⁷ Its mission is to deny extremists a base and to create security in an area where al-Qaeda has operated for years, with weak governments, regional disputes, and economic depression.⁸⁸ CJTF-HOA's footprint is small, but it contains forces from numerous

nations. Its area of operations includes Kenya, Somalia, Sudan, Eritrea, Djibouti, Ethiopia, and Yemen.⁸⁹ It works with these partners, minus Sudan and Somalia, to improve living conditions and increase the legitimacy of the partner nations. It assists in training security forces to fight insurgents and to deter, detect, or destroy al-Qaeda. Local populations are now resisting al-Qaeda.⁹⁰ When the CJTF conducts combat operations, they are conducted through the partner nations, or very quietly.⁹¹

While the operational commander should always employ indigenous or Muslim partners and work with them in a supporting role, this will not always be possible. Sometimes unilateral operations will be necessary. In these cases, mechanisms should be planned to maintain the legitimacy of a HN or partner.⁹² This can be achieved through low visibility operations which are below public awareness or which create the impression that a partner nation conducted the operation unilaterally. There is little or no media involvement and no visible U.S. presence. This could include an array of missions – information and intelligence operations, legal support, and the employment of Special Operations Forces (SOF). Examples are the U.S.’s support to the Northern Alliance in Operation Enduring Freedom and the ongoing operations in the Philippines.⁹³ If there are still occasions when U.S. forces must conduct operations unilaterally and overtly without the presence of any Muslim partner, an operational commander should plan to quickly replace U.S. forces with Muslim forces to preserve as much legitimacy as possible.⁹⁴

Humanitarian Assistance (HA) and other Civil Military Operations can be used to create legitimacy for the HN facing an insurgency, but it must be orchestrated to show that a HN is meeting the needs of its people without being co-opted by the U.S. If the government can meet the people’s needs, they will not turn to extremists. An operational

commander should also try to reintegrate local insurgents into main stream society, which increases the legitimacy of the HN government in the eyes of the local insurgents/population. In Afghanistan, it is possible to be a moderate Taliban member and still support the Afghan government. Allowing moderate opponents to participate in the political process will prevent them from supporting the insurgency.⁹⁵ In situations where the U.S. is operating overtly such as in Iraq, the HN government must always be portrayed as in control. For example, an Iraqi investigation of possible U.S. human rights abuses is vital to help establish the government as legitimate.⁹⁶

Another way to indirectly attack the ideological link between the local insurgents/population and al-Qaeda is to exploit their differences. It might be possible at the operational level to exploit divisions within al-Qaeda itself or differences between al-Qaeda and other extremists. Some non-al-Qaeda extremists have condemned al-Qaeda's methods since they believe al-Qaeda is hurting Islam. At operational and tactical levels, most local insurgents have their own agenda and some wish no al-Qaeda connection so that their movements will be seen as nationalistic.⁹⁷

Abu Musab al-Zarqawi, a Jordanian, was al-Qaeda's operational commander in Iraq. Unlike other senior al-Qaeda leaders, he favored attacks on the Shi'a, and he and his followers believed that ordinary Sunni Iraqis could be sacrificed to create terror. Zarqawi's extreme methods drove some Sunnis away and divided al-Qaeda in Iraq. Within extremist circles, his executions and attacks on Muslims at prayer became a source of contention. One well-known extremist ideologue, Abu Muhammad al-Maqdisi, condemned Zarqawi's methods which were turning the world against Muslims. Al-Maqdisi advised *jihadis* not to go to Iraq.⁹⁸ In July 2005, Ayman al-Zawahiri, bin

Laden's deputy, sent a letter to Zarqawi which was intercepted and made public. In it, he told Zarqawi to stop alienating the people of Iraq, stop his campaign against the Shi'a, and stop killing hostages. Zarqawi continued his methods and al-Qaeda strategic leaders told *jihadis* to go elsewhere instead of Iraq.⁹⁹

In Iraq, Zarqawi used Fallujah as his base, but some of its citizens disagreed with his methods and his *Salafi* beliefs that required men to grow beards and women to cover. The Ba'athist insurgents of Fallujah wanted the U.S. out of Iraq, but they disapproved of Zarqawi's kidnappings, indiscriminate bombings, and sabotage that was destroying infrastructure. Fighting began between al-Qaeda and Ba'athists in Fallujah. The Joint Psychological Operations Task Force (JPOTF) exploited this split using meetings, radio, TV, posters, and flyers to increase tensions. After Fallujah was retaken, the JPOTF employed a theme that Zarqawi had fled before the fighting began, leaving his followers to fight without him. However, when attempting to split insurgents groups, an operational commander should ensure he will not make matters worse; exploiting Sunni-Shi'a differences would not be beneficial.¹⁰⁰

As in the JPOTF case above, Information Operations (IO) are useful and can directly or indirectly attack the ideology link. All IO assets should be used in concert with public diplomacy, public affairs, and interagency assets, to achieve a synergetic communications effect.¹⁰¹ The IO campaign should be preemptive; an operational commander should not be forced to react to a sensational news story such as alleged human rights abuses by friendly forces.¹⁰²

IO can indirectly attack the ideology link by creating legitimacy for U.S. actions in Muslim nations. The theme can stress that nearly seven million Muslims live in the

U.S. where freedom of religion is protected. Muslims are integrated into American society, are respected, and enjoy a higher standard of living than the national average.¹⁰³ The theme would also stress that the U.S. has never engaged in religious wars and has never attempted to convert people to Christianity. The U.S. has provided aid and military assistance to Muslim societies and ended the ethnic cleansing attacks against Muslims in Croatia and Bosnia in the 1990s.¹⁰⁴

An IO theme to directly attack al-Qaeda's ideology is to portray life in an imagined Islamic Caliphate, which many Muslims would not prefer.¹⁰⁵ Life without Western commercial products, access to a Western style education, or any Western influences is not what many would like to imagine. This IO campaign should incorporate moderate Muslim religious clerics who can explain that al-Qaeda's ideology is un-Islamic and that warfare as depicted in the Qur'an is generally compatible with the spirit of international law and the Geneva Convention. It forbids attacks on non-combatants, the ill treatment of prisoners, and attacks like 9-11.¹⁰⁶ This would achieve more legitimacy and counter the link between the population and al-Qaeda more so than any direct U.S. efforts could. Attempts should also be made to co-opt universities, mosques, and religious schools to promote an Islamic counter-ideology to al-Qaeda that stresses the tolerance of other peoples and religions, which is the hallmark of Islam.¹⁰⁷

Conclusion

While we believe that democracy is the ultimate answer to the sources of extremism and insurgency, its application should be applied with restraint in Muslim societies; an operational commander should avoid trying to reshape a HN into a semblance of America. Of the 57 member countries of the Organization of the Islamic

Conference, only Turkey has a long functioning democracy, and no clear separation of church and state exists in Islam as in the U.S. It would be hard for Muslims to establish a democracy without religion being a part of it.¹⁰⁸ In Afghanistan, attempts to impose Western style democracy, religious tolerance, and gender rights are fundamentally counter to the culture,¹⁰⁹ and these efforts are strengthening al-Qaeda's strategic and operational COGs.

It is no longer advisable for the U.S. to conduct unilateral, overt combat operations in the Muslim world, which attempt to forcibly impose Western style concepts on Muslim societies as this will only increase al-Qaeda's global support. While isolated, historical examples of success with this approach can be found, today we live in an age of globalization and real time communications; what occurs in one Muslim nation occurs collectively in every Muslim nation through a Muslim global consciousness which has never existed before. It has been said that the key to defeating an enemy is to understand him; unless we begin to follow this "age-old" advice, we are doomed to continuing failure in WOT.

Glossary

CJTF-HOA	Combine Joint Task Force Horn of Africa
COG	Center of Gravity
COIN	Counterinsurgency
CT	Counterterrorism
DP	Decisive Point
HA	Humanitarian Assistance
HN	Host Nation
IO	Information Operations
JPOTF	Joint Psychological Operations Task Force
NDS	National Defense Strategy
NMSPWOT	National Military Strategic Plan for the War on Terrorism
NSS	National Security Strategy
SOF	Special Operations Forces
WOT	The War on Terror

End Notes

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